

NUMBER XXIV JUNE 2005

BREAKING GROUND

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TENNESSEE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES



EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS: PROMOTING FAMILY SUPPORT IN TENNESSEE (Daniel Rich pictured above.) [16]

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COVER PHOTO BY Deana Claiborne of United Cerebral Palsy of Middle Tennessee.

UPCOMING ART ISSUE 2005

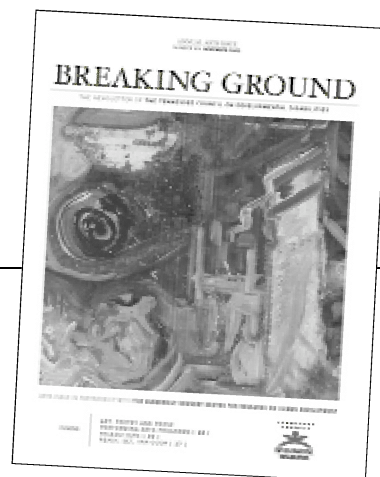
The editorial staff of *Breaking Ground* invite you to contribute to a special issue devoted to the arts coming in September 2005. All entries are to be submitted by July 15.

Do you write short stories or poetry? Do you paint, draw, or take pictures? Then we'd like to see your work for possible publication! The editor will consider:

- fiction up to 1,000 words and poems
- photos, and all forms artwork

This material must reproduce well in black-and-white. Content is devoted to materials by or about people with disabilities.

We'll give contributors a prominent by-line, a biographical note, and copies of the issue. Include your name, hometown, and a two or three sentence biography with your submission.



PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR SUBMISSIONS

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GOING TO THE MOVIES By Meredith Lorber

What is your favorite pastime? Whether for a Saturday night date or Sunday matinee, many Americans spend their time at the movie theater, a principal source of leisure and entertainment since its conception. For many viewers, a typical outing to the movies just got better, thanks in large part to Brenda Dillon, President of the Tennessee Council of the Blind (TCB) and finalist in the 2004 Titans Community Quarterback Award Program.

Mrs. Dillon is one of nine recipients to receive a \$1,000 grant for volunteer work in the community. This award will support the original work being done by TCB, which she has presided over for the past three years. In addition to information and referral, transportation, advocacy, and education services, Mrs. Dillon works hard to support regular social activities, continually enabling members to engage in and enjoy recreation and entertainment to the fullest.

Among the many events sponsored by the TCB, movie night is a favorite. A portion of Mrs. Dillon's award is being used to support the introduction of specialized equipment that provides descriptive narration of movies, along with the regular dialogue. The additional information and description is provided to the viewer via a headset, utilizing the technology without interfering with anyone else's viewing experience.

Secondary Audio Programming is a similar service provided by many television and satellite stations. But why should this service only be accessible in an individual's home? Since the arrival of the widely received and successful film *Ray*, audio description has become a new feature in theaters as well. Nashville's Regal Hollywood 27 currently presents two titles a week with this specialized equipment. Mrs. Dillon's husband, Dan, has been work-



TOP, DAN AND BRENDA DILLON. Right, Mrs. Dillon with Elise McMillan at the Annual Recognition Reception for Artist with Disabilities.

ing on this project and will continue efforts to increase the availability of such services.

Mrs. Dillon is also using her award to establish a blind bowling program. Initially sponsoring games and shoe rentals, TCB hopes to launch a blind bowling league by August 2005, ultimately installing bowling rails and increasing league participation.

From golf to game night to monthly supper clubs, TCB's wide range of programs is endless. At the core of each activity, however, is the same notion. Mrs. Dillon hopes that participants feel comfortable being active in any hobby or interest of their choice, without encountering barriers to absolute and unreserved enjoyment.

"It's important to live each day to the fullest," say Mrs. Dillon, "because we have no idea how long we're going to be here." This is the conviction of a woman who lives and works to generate the highest quality of life for herself, her family, and her community. "It takes determination!" she exclaims. If one individual's experience in a movie theater is improved by this hard work



and investment, then there is no question whether the effort is successful.

In addition, Mrs. Dillon is chair of the Mayor's Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities, wife, mother, and proud grandmother. The list of her accomplishments is extensive and the results have changed life for people with visual impairments. Brenda Dillon is, without a doubt, an exceptionally valuable presence to every community in Tennessee.

Meredith Lorber is the resource specialist for Tennessee Disability Pathfinder at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Family Outreach Center.

SOLVING THE PUZZLE OF AUTISM

By Stephanie Comer, Traci Fleischman, Jan Rosemergy

A FAMILY PERSPECTIVE

A child's first birthday is typically one of celebration. For Jon and Michelle Moore, it was the beginning of questions concerning their twin sons Cole and Alex. "Cole had a flat affect. He didn't want to touch his cake or open his presents. Something didn't feel right," said Mrs. Moore. After months of uneasiness and at a friend's suggestion, she called the Autism Society of Middle Tennessee.

"The Autism Society suggested TRIAD," said Mrs. Moore. TRIAD is the Vanderbilt Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders. "TRIAD took considerable time asking questions about Cole's development. They listened to my concerns. TRIAD knew what to look for, when others didn't. Cole was diagnosed with autism at 26 months of age."

Alex was different because he was more social than Cole, but as they learned more about autism spectrum disorders, they noticed Alex's repetitive behavior. Three months after Cole's diagnosis, Alex was diagnosed with pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS).

Since visiting TRIAD, Mr. and Mrs. Moore became involved in both research and clinical services, and in TRIAD's Enhancing Interactions (EI) class, which emphasized learning the skills needed to best interact with Cole. TRIAD displayed an activity and the Moores practiced while teachers were present to provide feedback and support.

"Our experience with the EI class raised the level of hope we have for our boys. When following their suggestions, the boys' level of communication went up. Seeing the progress

gives us the motivation to keep going," said Mrs. Moore.

Cole and Alex Moore are now 2-1/2 and are making great strides due to the attention they receive from TRIAD. "If the boys' autism had not been identified early, we shudder to think where they would be right now. With early identification and intervention, they have made—and continue to make—wonderful progress."

ABOUT AUTISM

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is present from early in life. It occurs in as many as 1 in 500 children and is about three times more common in boys than in girls. There are no medical tests for autism. The diagnosis is based on the presence of a pattern of behavioral symptoms: difficulty interacting with others, impaired understanding and use of language, and restricted patterns of activities and interests.

Autism is considered to be a spectrum disorder because the symptoms and characteristics can be present in different combinations and at different levels of severity. The disorders on the spectrum are autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, Rett's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, and PDD-NOS.

The specific causes of autism are not yet known, though there is consensus that genetic vulnerability and unidentified environmental factors cause atypical brain development. Early identification and early intervention are key components to optimizing outcomes for children with autism spectrum disorders.

TRIAD SERVICES

TRIAD is dedicated to improving assessment and treatment services for children with autism spectrum disorders

and their families while advancing knowledge and training. Directed by Wendy Stone, Ph.D., professor of pediatrics and psychology and a Kennedy Center investigator, TRIAD is a program of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development, the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt, and Vanderbilt's Department of Pediatrics/Center for Child Development.

TRIAD's mission is to offer a broad range of services to children and families in the community; to provide exemplary training to parents, service providers, and professionals; and to conduct state-of-the-art research to increase the understanding of the development and treatment of autism spectrum disorders.

TRIAD's clinical programs are available to families, schools, and professionals. Programs for families include behavior management classes; social skills groups; medical evaluation, treatment, and follow-up; TRIAD summer camp; and EI classes. A variety of programs are available to educators, including child-focused consultation, program consultation, specialized internship programs, and TRIAD Teacher Training (TTT). Several programs address the needs of both parents and professionals: Applied Behavior Analysis Workshops, Make-It/Take-It Visual Supports Workshops, and Individualized Education Plan Workshops. For information about TRIAD services, contact Penny Hamm at 615-936-1705 or penny.hamm@vanderbilt.edu, or on the Web at www.TRIADatVanderbilt.com.

AUTISM RESEARCH

Autism profoundly affects the lives of thousands of children and adults and their families. At the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, interdisciplinary research addresses the many puzzles of autism not only from the

angles of diagnosis and intervention but also genetics, brain science, and medical issues.

The earliest possible diagnosis is a major focus of TRIAD research. Dr. Stone and her colleagues have found that autism can be diagnosed accurately in 2-year-old children. Different clinicians agree about whether a child is on the autism spectrum, and the diagnosis appears to be stable over time. This means that intervention can begin early to improve developmental outcomes.

Dr. Stone's research results suggest that the most reliable behavioral indicators of autism in young children are a limited ability to engage in back-and-forth social interactions; a speech delay accompanied by a failure to use nonverbal methods of communication, such as eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions; and reduced interest in sharing one's experiences with others, such as pointing to or showing objects.

The results of Dr. Stone's research enabled her team to develop the STAT, a 20-minute play-based measure to identify children at risk for autism. The STAT can be used in home, community, or clinic settings. A variety of professionals, including speech pathologists, pediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, early intervention providers, and teachers, have participated in TRIAD's STAT training workshops.

Dr. Stone's recent research has focused on the behavioral characteristics of autism in children under 24 months. She is studying infants who are at elevated risk for developing autism, following their development over time until they reach the age at which a diagnosis can be made. The high-risk group being studied is later-born siblings of children with autism. While most siblings will not develop autism, the incidence in this group is 5% to 8%. Families interested in taking part in sibling studies can call 615-936-0265.



FUN AT TRIAD SUMMER CAMP.

About 10% of individuals diagnosed with autism have an identifiable genetic condition, such as fragile X syndrome or tuberous sclerosis complex. In most cases of autism, no specific underlying cause can be determined, but evidence suggests that the condition results from genetic factors and currently unknown environmental influences. Five to fifteen or more genes may play a role in the development of autism. These "susceptibility genes" confer some degree of elevated risk and may then predispose an individual to the development of autism.

James Sutcliffe, Ph.D., and Jonathan Haines, Ph.D., in Molecular Physiology & Biophysics, are collaborators in the Autism Genome Project, a consortium of autism research groups that is the largest ever to focus on the genetics of autism. The research of the Vanderbilt group led by Sutcliffe has resulted in the identification of specific genetic risk factors as well as chromosomal regions that are expected to contain one or more genes involved in the development of autism. Families interested in taking part can call 615-343-5855.

Continued on page 8

INTERNET RESOURCES

TRIAD (Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders):

www.TRIADatVanderbilt.com

Autism Spectrum-Health Topics, Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital:

www.vanderbiltchildrens.com/autism

Autism Society of Middle Tennessee: **www.autismmidtenn.org**

Autism Society of America: **www.autism-society.org**

Cure Autism Now: **www.cureautismnow.org**

National Alliance for Autism Research: **www.naar.org**

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder: **www.familypathfinder.org**

THE SCIENCE AND THE HOPE By Jan Rosemergy

THE VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER ANNIVERSARY

Who's turning 40? The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development, one of this nation's fourteen national Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities Research Centers (MRDD).

The MRDD centers are a network of regional centers established for research on mental retardation and related aspects of human development. Supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), they are responsible for research and research training aimed at preventing and ameliorating mental retardation and related developmental disabilities. The network is associated with University Centers for Excellence on Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service (UCEDDs). Each state has at least one UCEDD; Tennessee's is the Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities, University of Tennessee Health Science Center, Memphis.

The story of the MRDD Centers begins with the Joseph and Rose Kennedy family whose nine children included a daughter, Rosemary, with intellectual disabilities and a son who became president. As a brother, President John F. Kennedy understood the profound effects of disability not only on the individual but on the entire family and their relationship to the community.

President Kennedy's first step was creating NICHD in 1962, which was charged with investigating typical and atypical child development and mental retardation in particular.

Next he created the President's Panel on Mental Retardation. Among its members were Peabody College faculty members Lloyd Dunn, coordinator of special education, and Nicholas Hobbs, professor of psychology. The Panel recommended the establishment and sup-



port of Mental Retardation Research Centers to bring together scientists from many disciplines to address the causes and treatment of intellectual disabilities. On October 31, 1963, President Kennedy signed legislation to construct a national network of Mental Retardation Research Centers.

How did Tennessee get an MRDD Center? "Peabody College was considered the world leader in this arena," Mrs. Eunice Kennedy-Shriver said on the occasion of the Kennedy Center's 30th anniversary.

Peabody had the nation's first federally funded doctoral program in mental retardation research, begun in 1954. The Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation established Visiting Professorships in Mental Retardation Research at Peabody in 1962. The Institute on Mental Retardation and Intellectual Development, which Lloyd Dunn directed, was founded in 1964. With this remarkable record of commitment and leadership, Peabody was successful in the national competition for federal funds to construct two buildings to house the John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Education and Human Development. Matching funds were provided by Peabody College and the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation. The Convocation and groundbreaking were held May 19, 1965. The two buildings were completed and dedicated on March 31, 1968.

The MRDD centers represent our nation's commitment to preventing and treating developmental disabilities. They bring together scientists from many disciplines to work together, a strategy for advancing knowledge more rapidly and efficiently than any single discipline can accomplish alone. Each center competes every five years with other research universities for a "center core grant" that enables the center to provide an array of research support services that all the faculty associated with the center can access for their research. Thus these centers are cost-effective. MRDD center researchers have made an array of important discoveries related to causes of disabilities, treatment, and education.

Today the Center is a university-wide research, training, diagnosis, and treatment institute, embracing faculty and resources in Vanderbilt's Schools of Medicine and Nursing, the College of Arts and Science, and Peabody College. It has 150 faculty members from 19 disciplines. The Center brings together scientists and practitioners in behavior, education, genetics, and neuroscience to work together in unique ways to solve the mysteries of development and learning.

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center is distinctive in its historical strength in behavioral and educational research that today is greatly enhanced by an equally strong research program in genetics, neuroscience and brain imaging, and biomedical research. It also is distinctive in its commitment, to transfer research into practice, and to serve individuals with disabilities and their families. This commitment is embodied today in the Vanderbilt Kennedy Family Outreach Centers and its many clinics and programs.

What are examples of outstanding Kennedy Center research accomplishments? One of the earliest of the Center's research studies was the Early Training Project, led by psychologist and

Kennedy Center co-founder Susan Gray. During President Kennedy's administration, when ways were sought to reduce the effects of poverty, Sargent Shriver visited the Early Training Project and was inspired to found Head Start. Dr. Gray continued to follow the children who had been in the Early Training Project, from ages 3 to 21. Her findings of positive long-term motivational benefits, along with positive long-term findings from other studies in a national consortium on early education research, contributed to public policy supporting Head Start's continuation.

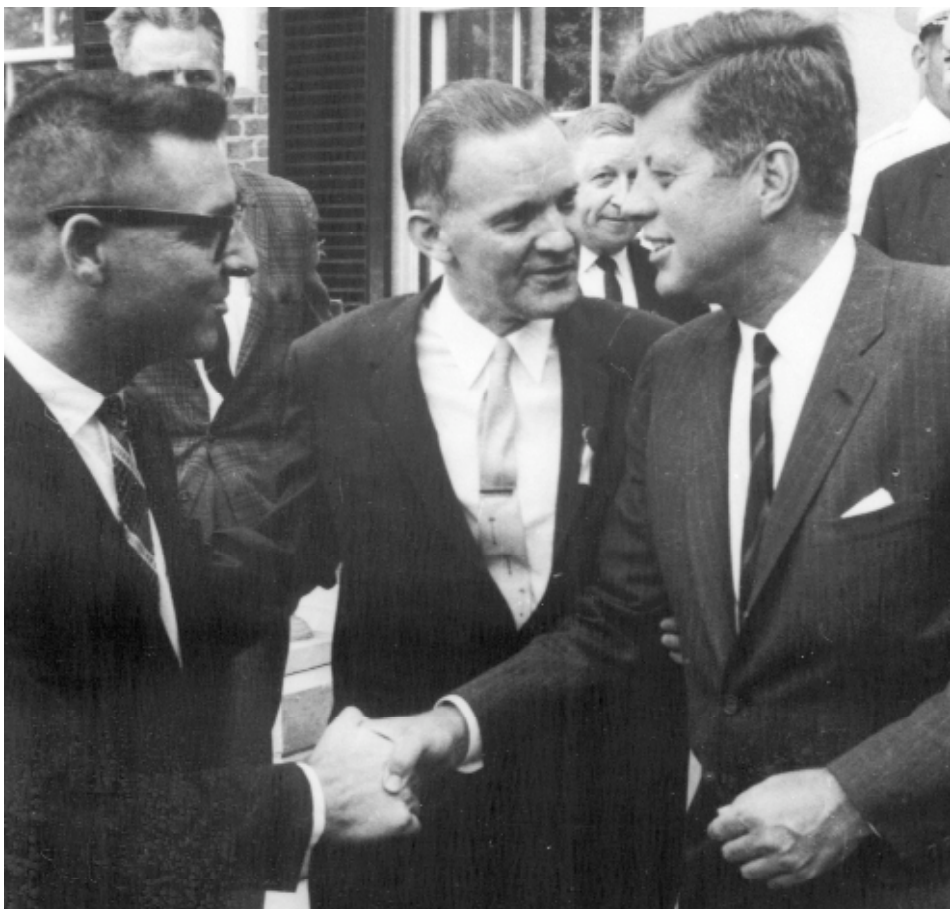
Inclusive early childhood education was first demonstrated in the Toddler Research and intervention Project during the early 1970s in the Kennedy Center's Experimental School (now the Susan Gray School). Researchers William and Diane Bricker found that having children with and without disabilities in the same classroom benefited the development of both groups of children. This project was truly pioneering, done before preschool education even for typically developing children was widespread.

As early as the late 1960s, Lloyd Dunn, a Center co-founder, was using research findings to challenge the prevailing educational approaches to intellectual disabilities. Arguing that use of segregated facilities might be not only ineffective but harmful, his work help give rise to the mainstreaming movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

The Classification Project, conducted during the mid-1970s under the direction of Nicholas Hobbs, critiqued prevailing approaches to the classification of children and associated intervention strategies. This project's findings contributed to the landmark legislation, P.L. 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (I.D.E.A.).

A major obstacle to successful inclusion of many persons with developmental disabilities is a high rate of problem behavior, e.g., aggression or self-injury. Kennedy Center researchers have been at the forefront of research and theory concerning maladaptive behavior. Many of the discoveries have been incorporated into therapeutic programs in schools and community settings. The work has focused on person-environment interactions, biological factors, and behavior modification techniques.

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TOP: IN MAY 1963, SHORTLY AFTER THE JOSEPH P. KENNEDY JR. FOUNDATION'S GIFT TO Peabody College to support Visiting Professorships for young scholars undertaking mental retardation research, President John F. Kennedy was introduced to the first three Visiting Professors (J. P. Das, William Lynch, and Leonard Ross) during a visit to speak at Vanderbilt University. Shown with President Kennedy are H. Carl Haywood (*left*), director of the Kennedy Center, Felix Robb (*center*), president of George Peabody College for Teachers, and Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington (*right back*). **BOTTOM:** Vanderbilt Kennedy Center co-founder and Peabody College psychologist Susan Gray (holding the beehive in this photo) directed DARCEE (Demonstration and Research Center for Early Education), one of the Center's major research programs in 1970s. DARCEE researchers developed an early curriculum for preschool education, which was disseminated nationally. A special concern was promoting the development of young children at risk because of poverty.



TENNESSEE ARTIST'S WORK CHOSEN FOR 2005 MEGAConference T-SHIRT DESIGN

Sara Andrea Bradley, known as "Andie" to her family and friends, is a very sweet woman with an endearing personality. She loves spending time with her family, drinking coffee and listening to music—that is, when she's not creating beautiful artwork.

Reflections, one of Ms. Bradley's acrylic pieces featured in the 2004 Breaking Ground Annual Arts Issue, was chosen to adorn the 2005 Tennessee Disability MegaConference T-Shirt. Ms. Bradley attends the Creative Expressions of Art program at Greene Valley Developmental Center. According to Kathy Rector, MR program specialist, "Andie's independent nature and free spirit allows for creativity in her artwork."

Ms. Bradley has exhibited and sold her artwork in various local, regional and State exhibitions and competitions, and is currently painting greeting card designs which may be purchased at the CE Art Studio and the Tennessee State Parks gift shops.

MEGAConference HIGHLIGHTS NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Alex Valdez
Peggy O'Neill
Ed O'Leary
John O'Brien & Jack Pearpoint

PLUS

Informative Workshops
Agency Exhibits
Arts & Crafts Festival
Mexican Fiesta Night
Awards Banquet & Dance

Limited stipends are available for self-advocates and their family members

FOR A CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM, VISIT:

www.tndisabilitymegaconference.org

Phone: 615-248-5878 (Nashville area)
1-800-835-7077 (toll free)

SOLVING THE PUZZLE OF AUTISM

Continued from page 5

Findings from imaging and behavioral studies in combination with genetic and biochemical studies suggest that autism may be the result of pervasive, early developmental abnormalities affecting neural information processing. Pat Levitt, Ph.D., Vanderbilt Kennedy Center director, studies molecular and cellular mechanisms that control the development of the forebrain and the causes of developmental and neuropsychiatric disorders, including autism. Genes that cause changes in how the circuits implicated in autism actually develop are being identified, and Dr. Levitt's lab is doing studies on these genes in children with autism and their families.

Sleep disorders are common in autism and other developmental disorders, and there is evidence that sleep and neuronal activity affect one another. Neurologist and sleep expert Beth Malow, Ph.D., has teamed with Dr. Stone and special educator Craig Kennedy, Ph.D., to explore the dynamics of sleep in children with autism and its relation to daytime behaviors. Families interested in taking part can call 615-936-0448.

Developing the most effective treatments for children with autism is paramount. Several intervention studies are underway to facilitate communication, language, and social development (see Web at kc.vanderbilt.edu/studyfinder or call 615-936-5118).

"The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, with TRIAD, has brought together a unified team of talented scientists," Dr. Levitt said. "We are working from a collective vision to solve the puzzles of autism and to bring better treatments to children and families."

Stephanie Comer, Traci Fleischman, and Jan Rosemergy are writers in the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Communications office.

TENNESSEE DISABILITY
MEGAConference

JUNE 1-5, 2005

COLLEGE IS AN OPTION By Elise McMillan

Micah Fialka-Feldman shared his success story of attending Oakland University in Michigan during the Tennessee Partners in Policymaking™ reunion in February.

Attending college has been a life-long dream for Mr. Fialka-Feldman. He started the program in Fall 2003 and enjoys campus life and being a college student.

"I am 20 years old. I am attending Oakland University as a public school student (I have an IEP). I have some learning needs, but I can do lots of things like sit in on college classes," said Mr. Fialka-Feldman. At Oakland, he takes classes in sociology, group communication, and computer. He also attends a reading laboratory.

In addition to being a student at Oakland, Mr. Fialka-Feldman is an active board member of Kids as Self-Advocates, and attends meetings of the group regularly in Washington DC. "I am a good advocate for friends of mine," he said. The group was formed to educate government officials and policy makers and promote health care issues.

He has also participated in the National Youth Leadership Forum and the Michigan Youth Leadership Forum for students with disabilities. He graduated in June 2004 from Michigan Partners in Policymaking.

Mr. Fialka-Feldman and his father,

Richard Feldman, shared their experiences about the Oakland program with those attending the Tennessee Reunion. Mr. Feldman worked at Ford Motor Company for 31 years and currently works at the International Headquarters of the United Auto Workers. Active in social justice and community work in southeast Michigan for more than 30 years, he is active in disability pride and justice activities.

At Oakland, students with disabilities attend general education classes and complete work with accommodations. They have taped lectures, student notetakers, test and paper accommodations and classmates who routinely study with them. Many had been told they would not ever have this opportunity to go to college. "We work on personalized goals on our own plans," Mr. Fialka-Feldman said. He rides the bus from his home to campus. "I learned how to take public buses to and from college."

The program is an alternative to a basic life skills program that many school districts offer to students receiving special education services after they complete high school. This program is designed to give the students a college experience. The students also have volunteer jobs on campus, according to Mr. Feldman, and participate in student organizations.

Mr. Fialka-Feldman is involved with the Social Work Club and enjoys community service work. He is also part of Hillel, a Jewish organization on cam-

pus. He has worked at the Educational Resource Library and has been involved with the child care program on campus. He has an interest in working in politics or government. He also enjoys doing public speaking at conferences, universities and other places about inclusion, disability rights and self-advocacy.

"It is a great college program," Mr. Fialka-Feldman said. "I hope a lot of other kids can have this same program, too." He credits his parents and family and his high school in preparing him for college. They helped him learn about computers, using a palm pilot and running meetings, being in clubs and being a self-advocate, he said. He learned how to look up information on the Internet to prepare assignments. His mother, Janice Fialka, is a noted national author and speaker. His sister, Emma, also is actively involved in sibling programs and other disability activities.

The program at Oakland University started in the Fall semester of 2003 with three students and has grown to six students currently. It is one of a growing number of programs across the country. An article by Mr. Fialka-Feldman about his college experiences will be published in a new book by AHEAD (www.ahead.org) about students with disabilities and their first years in college.

Elise McMillan is director of community outreach for the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.

THE SCIENCE AND THE HOPE Continued from page 7

Intervention procedures developed by Kennedy Center researchers are now widely used by clinicians.

Will there be a birthday cake? You bet, and we hope you'll come and get a piece. In September, you're invited to a fun-filled musical event. Details will be

available soon. On November 30, join us for a scientific symposium that will feature directors of three institutes within the National Institutes of Health and three world-renowned researchers, as we celebrate 40 years of accomplishments and look to meeting new challenges in the future. For more

information about these celebrations and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center today, visit its website kc.vanderbilt.edu or call (615) 322-8240.

Jan Rosemergy, Ph.D., is director of communications for the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

SILENT BUCS By John Piver

Silent Bucs is an on campus group comprised of students at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) who are interested in deaf and hard of hearing issues. The objective of Silent Bucs is trifold: to work towards improving communication between the deaf and hard of hearing community and the University; to encourage those who are deaf and hard of hearing to reach their goals by providing a thorough support system; and to work with deaf and hard of hearing people within the community.

In the past, Silent Bucs has been a part of campus activities, such as Winter

Cruise, Deaf Awareness Week, Disability Awareness Month, ETSU Homecoming Proclamation Ceremonies, and ETSU Sidewalk Preview. In the community, Silent Bucs has participated in the regional attraction of Kingsport FunFest, and performed Christmas carols within the local schools.

The group meets approximately once a month to discuss business and plan activities. This Spring, Silent Bucs has been involved with the theatre department at ETSU in the production, "Children of a Lesser God." The play has its debut in the Bud Frank Theatre

on the ETSU campus.

You can find Silent Bucs on the Web by accessing the address as follows: www.etsu.edu/students/disable/silent_bucs.htm.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SILENT BUCS, contact Libby Tipton, advisor, at 423-439-8490, 423-439-8370 (TDD), or e-mail tiptone@etsu.edu.

John Piver is a Council member representing the First Tennessee Development District.

NEWS FROM PATHFINDER By Carole Moore-Slater



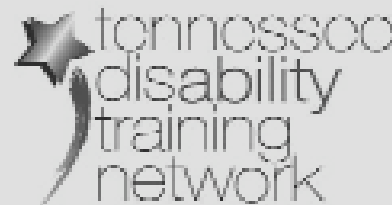
Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a statewide bilingual information and referral service for individuals of all ages with disabilities. Information is provided by phone, e-mail, printed directories and on the Internet at www.familypathfinder.org. Tennessee Disability Pathfinder online is a comprehensive referral service with phone, Web, and print resources (in English and Spanish) to connect persons with disabilities, family members, and advocates with service providers in Tennessee and with national resources. The website covers a variety of topics, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Recreation and Summer Camps, Mental Health, Child Care, Employment, Housing, Education, Health Care, Search for Services (statewide agency database that is updated daily), and Tennessee

Disability Training/Conference Calendar.

TENNESSEE DISABILITY TRAINING AND CONFERENCE CALENDAR

The vision of the Disability Training and Conference Calendar is to provide a centralized service in Tennessee where interested persons can access information about disability training opportunities and regional or statewide conferences.

Initially, individuals from the Disability Training Network throughout Tennessee were the only ones entering training or conference information on this interactive online calendar. It is now expanding, and any disability agency wishing to enter information about training events, or conferences can contact Disability Pathfinder (see below) for a calendar access code. If



an agency wants to include an event on the calendar, but is not interested in seeking an access code, please send information via e-mail to the Pathfinder office and staff will enter calendar information for you. The calendar is accessible from the Disability Pathfinder homepage or by visiting www.disabilitytrainingtn.org.

Carole Moore-Slater is the program director of Tennessee Disability Pathfinder.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Tennessee Disability Pathfinder, 615-322-8529 (Nashville area), 1-800-640-4636 (toll-free), 1-800-273-9595 (TTY), www.familypathfinder.org, TNPathfinder@vanderbilt.edu.

REMEMBERING LYLA FRANCES HAMBLÉN

By Ruthie-Marie Beckwith
LYLA FRANCES HAMBLÉN
 1944-2005

I first met Frances at a People First of Nashville meeting in 1984. Gale Feltner, Frances' boss at the Duncanwood Preschool, had suggested that she and a co-worker might enjoy coming to those meetings to learn about their rights and self-advocacy. Frances and her co-worker were the first two members from "outside" the system to join the chapter. Each would go on to make their own spectacular marks on the direction of the organization.

Frances was at once thoughtful, deliberate and steadfast in how she approached her membership in People First. She was a dynamo of energy and commitment. She was indefatigable, blunt, and full of compassion. The chapter sold Fuller toothbrushes as one of their first fundraisers at her behest. No challenge was perceived by her to be insurmountable. In her world view, sheer determination would ultimately prevail.

As the organization grew, so did Frances' leadership skills. She was an ideal role model for many of the members who lived in some of the most segregated environments of that time. She had a home, a family and a JOB! She lived her life outside the control and coercions of the SYSTEM. Her

freedom, and fearlessness because of it, drew others to her side and when she spoke, it was their thoughts and feelings that flowed out into the audience.

Those who knew Frances also will remember that she had no compulsions whatsoever about hassling people. As local chapter president, whenever members of People First of Nashville who lived at Clover Bottom failed to attend local chapter meetings, she would immediately call John Redditt, the superintendent at that time, for an explanation. Those members' attendance would then improve in short order. As state president of People First of Tennessee during its most infamous period, she called the office daily for reports from all the staff on their various activities.

When asked to serve as a team member for the first community review of services for the class members in *U.S. Department of Justice v. Arlington Developmental Center*, she readily agreed. After riding around West Tennessee tracking down class members who had moved out of Arlington prior to the signing of the remedial order, she found herself sitting on a mat on the floor in a West Tennessee group home with a young woman who had no means of verbal communication. Her report, short and laboriously written out by hand, stated simply, "She spoke to me. I looked her in the eyes and her eyes spoke to me."

In addition to her dedication to People First of Tennessee, Frances pursued a number of other interests. She was a bowler, a rug hooker, a fruit tea maker and, first and foremost, in love with young children. When her weight topped out at an undesirable level, she became a dedicated walker and ultimately claimed a new wardrobe with pride. She was a loving daughter, sister, and aunt.

Frances had a depth of character that illuminated the way for those who followed her lead and trusted in her uncanny intuitions about life. Although our friendship waned after she moved on to spend her later years in Dickson and I moved on from People First, the light she left behind will always serve as a compass for my inner heart. Thank you, Frances for being my mentor, and thank you foremost for shining your light of freedom on so many Tennesseans with disabilities.

Ruthie-Marie Beckwith, Ph.D., is executive director of the Tennessee Microboard Association.



2004-2005 TENNESSEE DISABILITY SERVICES & SUPPORTS DIRECTORY

2004-2005 Tennessee Disability Services & Supports Directory, published by the Tennessee Disability Pathfinder Office, is a source of information regarding state and local programs and services. The newest edi-

tion is available by geographic region (East, Middle, and West Tennessee). Order forms are available online at <http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/devents/order.html>



TENNESSEE PLANS FOR THE ALLIANCE FOR FULL PARTICIPATION SUMMIT

By Wanda Willis

Nearly two years ago, representatives from 11 national organizations came together to plan a national disability policy summit, which will be held on September 22 & 23, 2005, in Washington, D.C. The purpose of The Alliance for Full Participation Summit 2005 is to gather self-advocates, advocates, public and private program administrators, researchers, educators, and policymakers from across the country with the goal of planning national strategic social and policy goals for the future.

FOUNDING ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDE:

- American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR)
- American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR)
- Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
- National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD)
- National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP)
- National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems (NAPAS)
- The Arc of United States
- The National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS)
- United Cerebral Palsy (UCP)
- The Council on Quality and Leadership
- Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE)

The Alliance planned the Summit around three themes: Next Generation Leadership; Community Membership and Self-Determination; and Quality Supports and Services. To organize participation from each state, the Alliance calls for a State Team to prepare for the Summit, participate in the Summit, and follow up in the state after the Summit. Prior to the Summit, the State Team will identify barriers to goals, and strategies to overcome the barriers, in the three theme areas mentioned above.

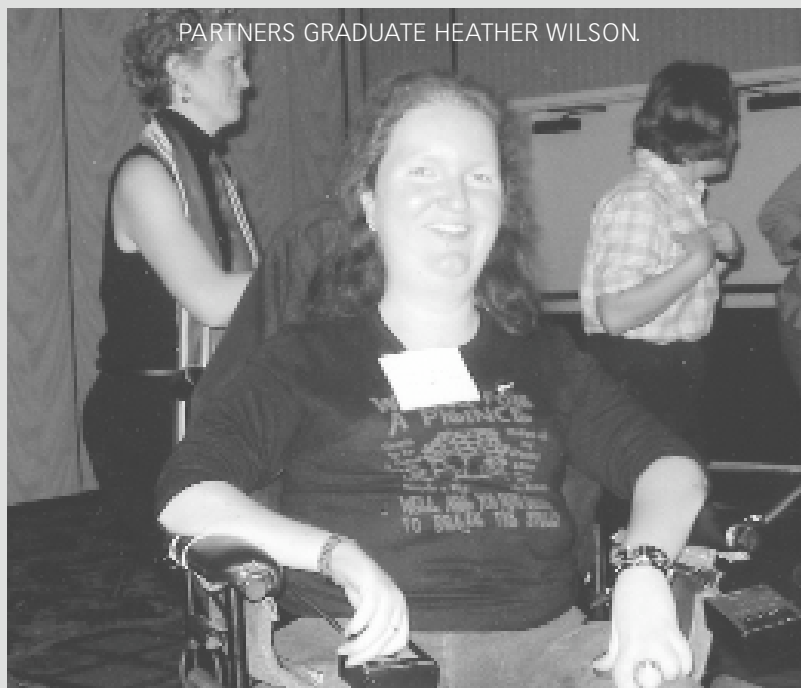
The Alliance provides a unique opportunity for a diverse and expansive group of disability organizations to create a long-range public policy agenda. For more information, contact the Alliance at www.allianceforfullparticipation.org or the Council office.

wanda willis is executive director of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

PARTNERS GRADUATES CHERYL SPENCER AND KATHY PLANK.



PARTNERS GRADUATE HEATHER WILSON.



PARTNERS GRADUATES



PARTNERS 11TH ANNUAL REUNION

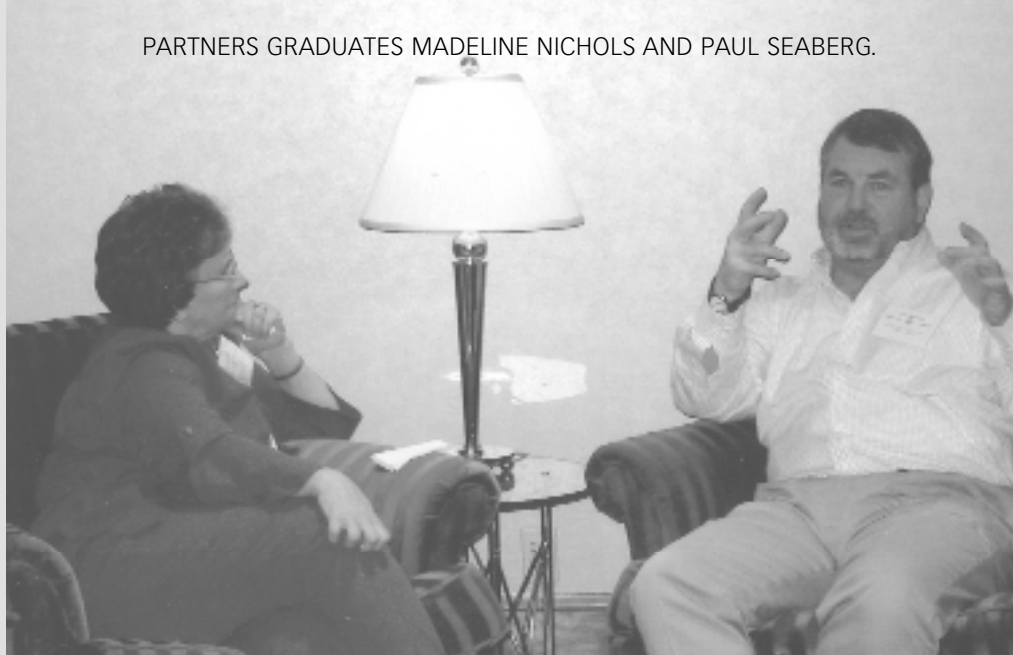
By Ned Andrew Solomon

On February 25 and 26 at the downtown Doubletree Hotel, Partners graduates and the current Partners class gathered for the 11th Annual Partners Reunion Conference. Partners in Policymaking™ is an advocacy and leadership training initiative of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities for adults with disabilities and family members of persons with disabilities.

The event kicked off with an inspiring keynote address on Emotional Intelligence by best-selling author Stephen Kuusisto (*Planet of the Blind*), followed by breakout sessions by Michele Flynn and Brian Dion (Home Ownership), Gail Williamson (Media Images of Disability), Micah Fialka-Feldman and Rich Feldman (College Opportunities for Young Adults with Cognitive Disabilities) (see article on page 9), and Cathy Randall (Social Security Benefits and Work Incentives). Friday evening, old and new friends socialized and networked during an informal reception and dinner before dancing the night away to hits from the '60s, '70s, '80s and '90s.

Saturday, after a networking breakfast, The Council's legislative liaison, William Edington, gave an update on State and Federal legislation and policy issues related to disability. Finally, Peggy O'Neill, a speaker of short stature from California, sent Partners on their way with a wonderful talk on Overcoming Inner Smallness.

For more information about the Partners program, or an application to participate in a future class, please contact program director Ned Andrew Solomon at 615-532-6556, or by e-mail at ned.solomon@state.tn.us.



PRESENTER CATHY RANDALL.



PRESENTERS RICH FELDMAN AND MICAH FIALKA-FELDMAN.



PARTNERS GRADUATES JOYCE SIEVERS AND LEISA HAMMETT.

EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS: PROMOTING FAMILY SUPPORT IN TENNESSEE

By Ned Andrew Solomon

In an effort to promote the success of the statewide Family Support Program and the need for additional State dollars to make the program available to the many people on its waiting list, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities used a portion of a grant from the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, "Tennessee Family Support Outreach Project", to fund the production of Family Support Awareness materials. Through a grant with United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of Middle Tennessee, Deana Claiborne, executive director of UCP, traveled around the state interviewing, photographing, and videotaping Family Support recipients, family members of Family Support recipients, Family Support coordinators and State, District and Local Family Support Council members, in an effort to get the "big picture" of the significant impact the program has on the lives of Tennesseans. The following article is an excerpt from a publication that will be produced by the Council at the end of the project.

Daniel Rich's gorgeous smile and generous, outgoing personality light up any room he happens to be in. His overwhelmingly positive attitude belies the serious physical and medical challenges he's had to overcome since being born three months prematurely at Vanderbilt Medical Center. Daniel was able to come home 51 days after his birth on Thanksgiving Day, 2000, but a grade three brain bleed and other complications have resulted in a primary diagnosis of cerebral palsy, and, "a little bit of everything!" as Mrs. Rich, his mom, puts it.

It's been an uphill battle for his family to get by financially, providing Daniel with his required medical needs, adaptive equipment and therapies, and emotionally, simply navigating the health care and social service system. Fortunately, the family has been able

to tap into the State's Family Support Program, which has helped them fill in the gaps left by insurance and other funding sources. "Family Support means a great deal to our family," says Mrs. Rich. "My husband, Bobby, is the only one who's able to work, because I have to take care of Daniel full time. Although it's not very much, it helps a lot—with diapers, and medicines that aren't covered, gas back and forth to the doctors. Every little bit helps."

WHAT IS FAMILY SUPPORT?

Family Support refers to funding and services provided to help families keep a family member with a disability at home, or, in other words, to prevent a person from being placed outside his or her community. Providing supports for persons with disabilities in their homes and communities helps maintain their quality of life—ensuring, to the greatest extent possible, their independence, productivity and integration into the community—and may, in many cases, cost society less than having individuals in institutions such as nursing homes and developmental centers.

Family Support is funded by State dollars, and was established to provide services that are flexible and responsive to families and their individual, unique needs. Services can include, but are not limited to, respite, day care, home modifications, equipment, supplies, personal assistance, transportation, homemaker services, housing costs, health related needs, nursing, counseling and training. It is also the only program in the State that addresses all disabilities and all ages.

Family Support was established in 1988 by the Division of Mental Retardation Services, with a small allocation of \$108,000, primarily to provide respite care for families. Today, the program distributes \$7.6

million in State funds administered by agencies located across the State. The success of the program is evident, with over 3500 individuals and families currently being served, and with an average cost per person of \$1538 a year. Unfortunately, limited funding for the program also means that nearly 4500 people are on the waiting list for Family Support.

HARD CHOICES

An essential element of Family Support is family and consumer involvement. Local Councils were created and meet on a regular basis to oversee the distribution of local funds. Delores Cherry is a Family Support Council member in the Upper Cumberland area. Her Council meets regularly throughout the year—on a strictly volunteer basis—to discuss the requests and the amount of dollars allotted to help the individuals and families in her area. "Which is never enough," says Ms. Cherry. "So we have to determine where to put what, who needs help with the most important things, and what is necessary at the time."

"Some of my clients struggle from week to week, from paycheck to paycheck," says Elaine Broyles, family support coordinator at H.A.T.S. (Habilitation and Training Service), covering Sumner, Robertson and Trousdale counties. "The children suffer, because there is just never enough to go around."

A REWARDING JOB

Despite the constant need for additional resources, Ms. Broyles has seen her share of small successes through Family Support and is thankful for a position that allows her to watch families begin to turn things around. "I didn't realize I would get so involved personally with the clients," Ms.



TRACEY AND DANIEL RICH



RICHARD GADBURY

Broyles says. "You get really attached, and they're like family. We spend time in their homes doing home visits and meeting with them, and their families. It's a very rewarding job."

Joyce Sievers, the family support coordinator at Pacesetters, which covers 12 Middle Tennessee counties in the Upper Cumberland region, echoes that sentiment. "You look at a family's situation, and you're aware of what's going on in Tennessee, and you know that there is no immediate answer for them—or the answer is a waiting list somewhere. If you can provide some little bit of something for them for the first time in their life, there is something utterly satisfying about that. You wouldn't change those feelings for anything in the world."

Ms. Sievers, a mother of a daughter with a disability who passed away two years ago, knows firsthand what families deal with on a daily basis and the financial stress of caring for a family member with few resources. "So many of our families are on very limited incomes," says Ms. Sievers, "and if they hit a bump in the road, there is really nothing much out there to help them besides Family Support."

Photos by Deana Claiborne of United Cerebral Palsy of Middle Tennessee.

HIGH DEMAND

Robin Phillips, director of Family Support for TEAM Evaluation in Chattanooga, has 250 Family Support recipients who she communicates with in some fashion on a monthly basis. In a typical three-month period, she handles nearly 800 intake calls. "A constant ringing phone throughout the day, of people checking in about their existing needs, or people with new needs, or other healthcare or state agencies referring people to our program," Ms. Phillips says. "They know that there's a waiting list, and the quicker they get their folks on the waiting list, hopefully the quicker we can get them additional resources and funding for what they're needing at that time."

Ms. Phillips has worked with one family for 4 years, ever since she started with Family Support. Susan had a car

accident and relies on her elderly parents to care for her. Her parents are at an age where they're unable to do much of the heavy-duty lifting that's required for Susan's care, so the family applies its Family Support allotment to hiring some outside help. "There's a personal assistant provided that helps the whole family," explains Ms. Phillips, "who works with the parents and helps Susan—but again, the funding is so limited that they save up for when they know there are going to be critical times, when Susan's going to need more help than her parents can give her."

STAYING IN THE COMMUNITY AT ALL COSTS

Richard Gadbury grew up in Michigan. He was a jock in high school and a good enough student to obtain academic and athletic scholarships for college. **Continued on page 17**

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON FAMILY SUPPORT, CONTACT THE FOLLOWING FAMILY SUPPORT PERSONNEL: IN WEST TENNESSEE

Susan Kurts-Acred: 901-213-1872; susan.kurts-acred@state.tn.us

IN MIDDLE TENNESSEE

Tammie Browning: 615-884-1921; tammie.browning@state.tn.us

IN EAST TENNESSEE

Guy Jones: 865-588-0508, ext. 128; guy.jones@state.tn.us

STATEWIDE

Jan Coatney: 615-532-6552, or 1-800-535-9725; jan.coatney@state.tn.us

CASTING DISABILITIES IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT

By Jon Kent

AN INTERVIEW WITH LA CASTING AGENT GAIL WILLIAMSON

Whether you're watching television or the big screen, when you see a character with a real-life disability, there's a very good chance that Los Angeles casting agent (*I'm not an agent, I am an advocate for performers with disabilities who works with casting directors*) Gail Williamson played a part behind the scenes. Ms. Williamson, who is the executive director of the Down Syndrome Association of Los Angeles, has devoted much of her long and distinguished career in Hollywood paving the way for actors with disabilities. Ms. Williamson visited Nashville recently to conduct a workshop for the Council's Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute. The title of her workshop was "Media Images And How They Change Social Opinion," and she delivered it to a packed room. *Breaking Ground* spoke to Ms. Williamson about the power of mass media, her career, and the important role that acting can play in the lives of people with disabilities.

BG: When and how did you first get involved with helping to cast people with disabilities?

GW: My son, Blair, has Down syndrome. When he was 11 and participating in Special Olympics, Proctor & Gamble selected him to be featured as a runner in a commercial. I think Blair got the role because he had the endurance to run for the 4 hours that it took to capture the "right" 15 seconds. I saw how Blair's participation changed the perception of the crew that day, and it struck me that there should be more exposure in the media industry to people with disabilities.

BG: What year was this?

GW: Around 1992. I remember

because the television show *Life Goes On* was on. On the show, Chris Burke, who was a child (young man) with Down syndrome, played the character "Corky." I remember the important influence the character of Corky had on Blair, and over time, how instrumental the show was in changing the public's perception of my son.

BG: Let's start with the influence the show had on your family.

GW: At that time, Blair believed that because his father and brother didn't have Down syndrome, it was something that went away—something he would grow out of—and this totally surprised me. Without knowing it, I realized that I hadn't offered Blair any adult role models. So when I told him that he could grow up and be like Corky, he thought that was pretty cool. *Life Goes On* also gave my other son a healthy role model for being a sibling of a child with Down syndrome and reinforced the fact that it is OK to get angry with your brother when he irritates you even if he has a disability.

BG: How did it help shape the public's perception of Blair?

GW: Well, for example, when our family used to go to a restaurant, the server would often ask us "And what does he want," —referring, of course, to Blair. After a couple of seasons of the show, we noticed that the public started talking directly to Blair, asking him what he wanted, looking him straight in the face. I don't mean to suggest that people were mean to him before: they just didn't know the appropriate thing to do.

BG: So this reminded you of the awesome power of television and mass media?

GW: Absolutely. I thought that there really needed to be more opportunity for people, especially children, to turn

on the TV and see role models that they can relate to—people who look and act like them. So I began looking for an outlet to channel my new passion.

BG: Where did you turn?

GW: I found The Media Access Office, which was a part of the California Governor's Committee. It had been around for 15 years, and its job was to be a casting liaison for actors with disabilities because these people have notorious problems finding agents. As a State Office, one of their primary concerns was finding employment for people with disabilities. They really hadn't ventured much into the area of casting children. So I volunteered for six years—from 1992-1998—and built a children's division. In 1999, I wrote a grant to help fund a nonprofit arm of our office and I became a full-time staff member.

BG: Tell me some of the successes you had during your tenure.

GW: I helped cast a woman with Down syndrome on the TV show *ER* and also served as her dialogue coach. The folks from *ER* referred me to the producers of *Touched By An Angel*, and I worked with their staff on three shows. Not only did I help cast and coach dialogue, but I also helped the writers. I went on to work with many other shows and often assisted the writing team. Interestingly enough, I found out about a diversity initiative that the African American community was promoting with major studios and felt strongly that people with disabilities should be included under this umbrella.

BG: What kind of response did you get?

GW: I first reached out to ABC Disney and developed a relationship with the people working with diversity issues for them and they were very receptive.

Continued on page 19

UPDATE ON THE SHELBY COUNTY VOTE! CAMPAIGN

By Kevin Lofton

The 2004 presidential election has come and gone; and whether it turned out good or bad I guess depends on your political affiliation or point of view. Nevertheless, you can rest assured the Shelby County VOTE! Campaign was right in the thick of things.

We did some phone banking in October to remind people to be sure they were registered to vote and to get out and exercise their constitutional right either in early voting or on Election Day. We contacted over 350 individuals with help from Memphis Center for Independent Living (MCIL) staff, Shelby County VOTE! Campaign members, and other volunteers who donated their time and effort. I would like to take this opportunity to heartily thank everyone who gave of their time and energy to help us with the phone banking effort. I also want to thank Joanne Rich and the Tennessee Disability Coalition's statewide VOTE! Campaign for furnishing us with the call list from their database.

The Shelby County VOTE! Campaign

continues its work with the Shelby County Election Commission. We continue to educate election officials about disability awareness: don't assume a person with a disability needs assistance in the voting process, ask first; use "people first" language when talking with a person with a disability; that alternatives, such as early voting, are only temporary while the community fixes its access issues; and that people with disabilities should be treated with respect because voting is a civil right.

Sandi Klink, MCIL's program director and active Shelby County VOTE! Campaign member, recently attended an exciting and informative conference on voting in Washington, D.C. The theme and title of the conference was "Closing the Political Participation Gap". This conference was organized by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and United Cerebral Palsy.

Ms. Klink explained that there were many well informed and excited speakers at the conference, including Jim Dixon of AAPD. A lot of ideas and information were shared about organizing Vote campaigns. Ms. Klink report-

ed that the Tennessee statewide VOTE! Campaign was said to be one of the three best organized and most active campaigns in the country.

The Shelby County VOTE! Campaign needs you! If you would like to become involved, call Kevin Lofton or Sandi Klink at (901) 726-6404. While you are thinking about whether or not to be a part of the Shelby County VOTE! Campaign, consider the following quotes.

"Get into politics as if your life depends on it...because it does." — The late Justin Dart.

"The right to vote stands at the core of a properly functioning democracy. No one should be denied the franchise simply because they cannot physically access their polling place." — R. Alexander Acosta, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights.

We need your help to make equal access at the polls a reality in our community.

Kevin Lofton is an independent living specialist with the Memphis Center For Independent Living.

EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS Continued from page 15

He was happily married with three children when a swimming accident left him with a spinal cord injury. The accident cost him his marriage and much of his independence. "I knew after my accident that I had two choices: to get bitter, or better about it," recalls Mr. Gadbury. "I decided to get better."

Mr. Gadbury moved to Chattanooga to escape the extreme cold of Michigan. He arrived in Tennessee with no friends, and no health care, and was getting by with volunteer helpers as personal assistants. "It was difficult to

be here," Mr. Gadbury says. "I lived in an apartment complex, and tried to find different funding agencies. One of the social workers I was going to told me I'd picked one of the worst states to move to in terms of funding."

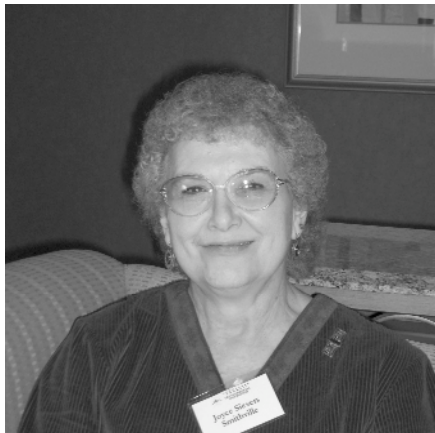
Luckily, Mr. Gadbury was able to take advantage of one of his social worker's other recommendations: getting hooked up with the Family Support Program. Although the limited dollars cannot cover all his needs, and he still relies on volunteers to help in several areas, Family Support helps him stay

on his own, in his community. "If it wasn't for the way the dollars are used to help us, most of us would end up in some sort of institution," Mr. Gadbury says. "It would cost society—and the State—a lot more money than these dollars which help us have somewhat of a normal life and hopefully be productive in society. With me, I'm not rich enough or poor enough or sick enough or old enough or whatever to qualify for most of the programs. This program is one where I don't fall through the cracks."

MEET COUNCIL MEMBERS FROM ACROSS THE STATE

By Ned Andrew Solomon In recent issues of *Breaking Ground*, readers were introduced to the newest Governor-appointed members of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. At this time, and over the next few issues, we will familiarize you with our existing Council members, who have helped the Council plan and review its statewide initiatives, and who have been actively and effectively breaking ground in their own communities.

FROM THE UPPER CUMBERLAND DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT



JOYCE ELAINE SIEVERS

Smithville, Tennessee
DeKalb County

FAMILY MAKEUP: Widowed; One son and one daughter, four grandchildren

DISABILITY OF FAMILY MEMBER:

Daughter, who passed away in 2002, had mental retardation

BIRTHPLACE: Watertown, South Dakota

EMPLOYMENT: Pacesetters, Inc., Algood, Tennessee; Family Support Director and Art Grant Director

HOBBIES AND PASTIMES:

Book artist and book arts instructor

Areas of interest: "All!"

FAVORITE QUOTE: "Work is love made visible"—Kahlil Gibran

Ned Andrew Solomon is the director of Partners in Policymaking™ for the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

FROM THE SOUTHWEST TENNESSEE DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT



RANDY OLIVER

Jackson, Tennessee
Madison County

FAMILY MAKEUP: Single

DISABILITY: C5-c6-c7 spinal cord injury; wheelchair user for 30 years

BIRTHPLACE: Jackson, Tennessee

EMPLOYMENT: Assistant Manager, Bob's Custom Upholstery

HOBBIES AND PASTIMES: Playing basketball; watching NASCAR racing; collecting 1/24 die cast NASCAR models; music; speaking to groups about the Council on who they are and what they do; spending time with family

AREAS OF INTEREST: Transportation, healthcare, and ADA issues

FAVORITE QUOTE: "It's not the disability of a person, it's the ability of the person to succeed."—Randy Oliver

FROM THE MEMPHIS DELTA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT



STEVEN ZEE SHEEGOG

Memphis, Tennessee
Shelby County

FAMILY MAKEUP: Married to LeVon D. Sheegog, two children: son, Steven Zee Sheegog II, daughter, Alisha R. Sheegog

DISABILITY OF FAMILY MEMBER:

Steven II, age 16, has autism (PDD-NOS)

BIRTHPLACE:

Charleston, Mississippi

EMPLOYMENT: First Horizon National Corporation (known as First Tennessee)

HOBBIES AND PASTIMES: Spending time with family; movies; prep sports and golf

AREAS OF INTEREST: Education; training; employment

FAVORITE QUOTE: "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me."—Philippians 4:13

CASTING DISABILITIES IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT

Continued from page 16

It took me three long years, but I finally made significant inroads at CBS as well. I was hired as a contractor for the State of California to continue this work but in late 2003 our new governor terminated (suspended) all State contract employees. I was approached by the Down Syndrome Association of LA to be their executive director and accepted the challenge. The

MEMBER-AT-LARGE



BECKY D. SMITH

McMinnville, Tennessee
Warren County

FAMILY MAKEUP: Married

DISABILITY: Juvenile rheumatoid arthritis

DISABILITY OF FAMILY MEMBER:

Husband, Tony, has cerebral palsy

BIRTHPLACE: McMinnville, Tennessee

EMPLOYMENT: Independent Avon Representative

AREAS OF INTEREST: Healthcare

HOBBIES AND PASTIMES: Church activities and watching movies

FAVORITE QUOTE: "Greater is He that is in me, than he that is in the world."—1 John 4:4, John: the Disciple of Jesus

Association felt like the work that I had been doing with the media was important to our mission so I continue to work for social change.

BG: Are you pleased with the progress that's been made in casting actors with disabilities?

GW: Yes. There's still a way to go for sure. But we've come a long way. It used to be that typical actors played characters with disabilities—actor's who do not have the disability they are portraying. I'm not opposed to this for major roles and leading roles: in fact, it can be a good thing when Dustin Hoffman plays a person with autism, or most recently, Jamie Foxx's performance as Ray Charles. And actors covet these roles because they often lead to Oscar nominations. But I do have a major problem when a person with a disability is clearly capable of carrying out a role and is passed by. Fortunately, that is happening less often.

I feel good about it when a star does a role that will bring in fans to view the story, perhaps people who would not hear a story that includes disability will get to hear one. I don't like it when an unknown does a role (major or leading) that someone with a disability could have done—actors with disabilities have trained and have great acting skills.

BG: Let's switch gears a bit and talk about acting. What does the craft of acting do for people with disabilities?

GW: First and foremost, it helps the person stay present in the moment, which I feel can be a major challenge for many people with disabilities. It



GAIL WILLIAMSON AND FRIENDS.

hones their listening skills, makes them more comfortable with their body. And acting builds esteem. In addition to my work with media, I have spent a great deal of time in my career promoting acting/performance at the community level. Acting classes and performances at community theatre venues can be very beneficial to people with all types of disabilities.

BG: So you would encourage the aspiring actor with disabilities to pursue his/her dream?

GW: Absolutely. There's more potential than ever. But as I would tell any aspiring actor: "Keep your day job." Of the 100,000 or so actors in the Screen Actors Guild, only 9% make the annual minimum salary to qualify for benefits, which is \$9,000. But that's no reason not to pursue your dream. Acting can help you develop personally and also help change public perception.

Jon Kent is the editor of Breaking Ground and principal of Kent Communications Group in Nashville.



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